

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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MARKEY STATEMENT ON THE RELEASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE 1 YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Thank you, Ranking Member Turner, for all the hard work you and your staff have put into creating this very important report.

Almost two and a half years have passed since Flights 11, 77, 93 and 175 were hijacked on a clear September morning, taking the lives of thousands of innocent people and shaking our sense of safety and security.

The security of the nation's aviation system is an especially pressing concern for those of us from Massachusetts. American Airlines Flight 11 and United Flight 175 took off from Boston's Logan Airport. There were 81 passengers and 9 crew members on Flight 11, and 56 passengers and 9 crew members on Flight 175 when the planes were crashed into the World Trade Center. Many of us attended the funerals of those killed on that day.

Since the September 11th terrorist attacks, some improvements have been made to the nation's aviation security system, but many dangerous loopholes remain untouched. Today, intelligence sources tell us that these loopholes still present tempting targets for terrorists who seek to use passenger and cargo airplanes to harm America.

This past September, a shipping clerk packed himself inside a wooden crate and shipped himself undetected from New York to Dallas aboard a cargo plane. Earlier this month, 3 stowaways from the Dominican Republic reportedly traveled undetected to Miami aboard a cargo plane. Despite these security breaches, cargo transported on passenger planes STILL is not screened for explosives or other dangerous materials. The Bush Administration tells us that shippers can be trusted to place their cargo on passenger planes without inspections. But you can bet that if President Reagan were observing this operation, he would not just trust the shippers, but also verify that their cargo was safe by having it physically inspected before loading on passenger planes.

Americans empty their pockets, take off their shoes, walk through the metal detectors, submit their luggage to rigorous computer screening, and hand over their nail clippers to the TSA. But they are biting their nails as they watch mail and commercial cargo being loaded onto the very same planes without ever being physically inspected.

Next time illegal and unscreened cargo could be a terrorist instead of a tourist or homesick twenty-something. Or it could even be explosives, chemical, biological or radiological weapons. Despite these potential dangers, the Bush Administration continues to fight legislative efforts to screen cargo, doesn't even audit the inadequate security practices of companies who ship cargo, and drags its feet on implementing new screening technologies.

The Democratic plan we are releasing today calls for 100% physical inspection of cargo that's transported on passenger planes. For the safety of airline passengers and crew members, the Bush Administration should immediately stand with us in support of this critical safety measure.

The Democratic plan also calls for improved screening for airport workers. This reform is critical. I have watched airport employees go in and out of secure areas of the airport, without once having to show ID or be screened. Every single time an airport worker reports to a secure area of an airport, he or she should have to pass through security, just as pilots and flight attendants do. The employee entrance to secure areas of airports must not be an unprotected entry point.

The Bush Administration has showered billions of dollars in tax benefits on the wealthiest Americans. The White House must not nickel and dime aviation security. The American people deserve more than security on the cheap.

As the first anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security approaches, the plan we are introducing today should serve as a guide for the Department and the Bush Administration in the weeks and months to come.

Thank you.

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